Ethical Imaginationism

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Date: 2026
Status: Defined framework

Definition

Ethical Imaginationism (EI) is an artistic framework that rejects the assumption that viewing art is ethically neutral. It removes the structural contradiction in which art is treated as ethically meaningful while spectatorship is treated as consequence-free.

EI does not add moral instruction, symbolism, or narrative explanation. Instead, it operates through omission, positioning, and structural restraint, requiring the viewer to occupy ethical presence rather than interpret ethical meaning.

What EI Refuses

Ethical Imaginationism explicitly refuses:

- Moral explanation
- Symbolic substitution for responsibility
- Narrative resolution as ethical closure
- Psychological interiority as ethical authority
- The assumption that interpretation absolves implication

EI does not ask what a work “means.”
It asks **where responsibility is allowed to disappear**.

Core Principles

1. **Viewing is not ethically neutral**

The act of looking carries responsibility independent of intention or interpretation.

2. **Omission is ethically active**

What is withheld must matter structurally, not rhetorically.

3. **Meaning must not resolve responsibility**
Explanation, symbolism, or emotion cannot discharge ethical weight.
4. **The viewer must be positioned, not instructed**
Ethical pressure arises from placement, not persuasion.
5. **Failure is admissible**
Works may fail EI without invalidating the framework.

Criteria for an EI Work

A work operating under Ethical Imaginationism must:

- Withstand misreading without collapsing
- Function without explanatory context
- Maintain ethical pressure after the image is understood
- Refuse narrative, symbolic, or emotional escape routes
- Implicate the viewer regardless of agreement

If a work resolves into comfort, clarity, or moral certainty, it fails EI.

The Role of the Viewer

The viewer is not an observer, witness, or interpreter.

The viewer is **present**.

EI removes the distance that allows spectatorship to function as safety. The viewer is not asked to judge, empathize, or decode, but to remain ethically situated without resolution.

Limits of Ethical Imaginationism

Ethical Imaginationism does not apply universally.

EI does **not** claim:

- All art must operate ethically
- All art should deny expression

- All works benefit from ethical pressure

EI is a framework, not a doctrine.
Its strength depends on restraint and exclusion.

Authorship and Attribution

Ethical Imaginationism was articulated, named, and structurally defined by **Samuel Hernandez**. The framework exists independently of individual works and may be engaged, rejected, or critiqued without reference to the originator.